

The University of Chicago

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DEFENDS AMERICA

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE
HUMANITIES IN CANDIDACY FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

AUGUST, 1941

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WALTER JOHNSON

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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In this strange spectacle of the United States wrestling mentally with a problem of world policy, nothing is stranger than the sight of William Allen White, an editor from a small city in Kansas, leading the argument.

In these words, Time Magazine for August 19, 1940, described William Allen White's role as chairman of the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. But Time added, in a penetrating observation:

Yet now he does so and to him there is no wrench in doing so. . . . He has long been a one-man committee to defend the kind of democracy that he has known and in his view events have simply given his Committee a new title.

Here is expressed much of the story of William Allen White's life! A belief in the democratic way of life, based upon reason and justice, not upon force, has been the dominating fact of his existence since the Progressive era. To the editor of The Emporia Gazette, democracy can exist neither in a nation "half slave and half free" nor in a world "half slave and half free." In the country as a whole, as well as in his native Kansas, together with other liberal thinkers, he has devoted his life to eradicating injustices from the social and economic system--injustices which he feels have been altogether too common. Years of his life have been spent in organizing public opinion to persuade the Kansas Legislature, the Republican party, and the Federal Government to adopt progressive measures in social legislation and such democratic reforms as the initiative, referendum, recall, and the direct election of United States Senators. When he organized and headed the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, he was merely continuing a process to which he had been devoting his long life--that of giving "the average, isolated citizen a chance through a nation-wide organization to make his private sentiment function as public opinion."¹ William Allen White has been fighting continuous battles for democracy against its ubiquitous

¹William Allen White, "The Story of a Democratic Adventure" (Unpublished manuscript on the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies). (In Mr. White's personal files.)

enemies. In the 1920's, he lambasted the Ku Klux Klan through his editorials and ran for governor in 1924 on an anti-Klan platform. In 1938, he violently opposed with the power of his newspaper and his influence the political aspirations of Gerald K. Winrod, Kansas Fascist, who was running for United States Senator. Always, in the nation, as well as in Kansas, he has opposed attempts to suppress the civil liberties of the people. Therefore, it is not surprising, with this record in mind, to find that Mr. White should turn to organizing a movement to meet another threat to his American democratic way of life.

The prairie editor has had an interest in the relation of foreign affairs to American life since the Progressive days. He ignored the World War during its first few months and devoted his editorials to internal affairs, but gradually his editorials reflected a realization that isolation was impossible. Coming to the conclusion that isolation was no sure road to future world peace, he became a vice-president of the League to Enforce Peace, an organization founded after the outbreak of the war with the purpose of providing some machinery to replace slaughter as a means of settling future international disputes. With the Armistice, he looked for a new world based upon reason and justice. As a reporter at the peace conference, he supported Woodrow Wilson's League of Nations, and he warned his American audience that the United States was "part of the world family of nations, and must take her part."¹ Although he disliked many features of the peace treaty, he felt that American participation in the League of Nations would serve as a means to ameliorate the worst of these features.²

On his return to the United States, he gave vigorous support to the League of Nations and was merciless in his assault on Republicans who were opposing the League.³ Mr. White served on the sub-committee which drew up the Republican platform for 1920. Clark Eichelberger, speaking for entrance into the League of Nations, happened to appear before this committee and thus began a long relationship with Mr. White in the organization of sentiment

¹The Weekly Emporia Gazette, April 10, 24, 1919.

²The Weekly Emporia Gazette, April 10, 24, 1919.

³The Emporia Gazette, September 13, 1919.

for internationalism. During the campaign of 1920, Mr. White stood with other leading Republicans like Herbert Hoover, Taft, Hughes, Root, and A. Lawrence Lowell, who told the nation that a vote for Harding was a vote for the League.¹

The collapse of collective security in the decades of the 1920's and 1930's caused William Allen White great concern. Japan's aggression in China, and Italy's march into Ethiopia made him feel that a world conflict might soon develop. If such a conflict came, the United States could not stay out.² He was torn between two poles of thought--the desire for peace for the United States and the realization that internationalism was necessary for a real peace, although this internationalism meant the danger of war because of the strife of Europe. His desire for peace led him to support the Neutrality legislation (1935-1937).³ But his pacifism did not lead him to accept the doctrine of isolation. When the Nazis seized Austria in March, 1938, he clearly saw the danger to the United States and advocated the calling of a world conference to consider the demands of the underprivileged nations.⁴ When Hitler won his demands at Munich in September, 1938, Mr. White prophesied that sooner or later a clash was coming between the totalitarian nations and the democracies.⁵

Mr. White not only opposed the aggressor nations by words, but he joined organizations that were formed to meet the challenge. He was a member of the Union for Concerted Peace Efforts of which Clark Eichelberger was the director; he served as honorary vice-chairman of the American Committee for Non-Participation in Japanese Aggression; he was a member of the American Boycott Against Aggressor Nations; and, a member of the Board of Directors of the National Refugee Service.

When Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, Mr. and Mrs. William Allen White were at their cabin in Moraine Park, Colorado, escaping from the Kansas heat. Within two weeks, they were home, and Mr. White was writing editorials about the

¹The Emporia Gazette, October 15, 1920.

²The Emporia Gazette, February 15, July 20, 1935.

³The Emporia Gazette, October 9, 1935; October 6, 1936.

⁴The Emporia Gazette, March 3, 1938.

⁵The Emporia Gazette, October 6, 1938.

conflict. He supported President Roosevelt's proposal to repeal the embargo against selling arms and ammunitions to nations at war and instead substitute a cash and carry plan.¹ Although he once had stood for a complete embargo to warring nations, he did not permit this to deter his taking a different stand necessitated by changing events. It had become evident to him that the embargo clause worked to the disadvantage of the democracies, our natural allies, and to the advantage of the aggressor nations since Germany particularly had a head start in her preparations for war.

On September 26, Clark Eichelberger, director of the Union for Concerted Peace Efforts, called Mr. White from New York City and asked him to head a Non-Partisan Committee for Peace Through the Revision of the Neutrality Act. The work of this new committee would be done in the office of the Union for Concerted Peace Efforts in New York, and the Executive Committee of the Union--Hugh Moore, Henry A. Atkinson, Edgar J. Fisher, and Clark Eichelberger--would serve as the executive agency for the National Committee.² At first, the editor of The Emporia Gazette demurred at Clark Eichelberger's request. He was seventy-one years old and wanted to devote the rest of his time to writing his autobiography and several other books. But Mr. Eichelberger was not willing to take "no" for an answer. He corralled a number of Mr. White's New York friends and had them wire or telephone to Emporia. The three friends who clinched Mr. White's acceptance were Betty Gram Swing, Irene Lewisohn, and Dorothy Canfield Fisher--old Kansas friend. It was to Mrs. Fisher that he finally said "yes."³

William Allen White accepted the chairmanship only on the condition that there would be no munition makers' money, no international bankers' money, and no money from the steel interests used in the campaign.⁴ A list of prominent professional men, college presidents and college professors, leading businessmen, and

¹The Emporia Gazette, September 22, 1939.

²Atkinson, Moore, and Eichelberger to White, September 26, 1939. (White Manuscripts)

³White, "The Story of a Democratic Adventure." (White Manuscripts)

⁴White to Eichelberger, telegram [no date]. White Manuscripts)

labor leaders were asked to join the Committee. With their support assured, they received instructions from Clark Eichelberger to talk to their friends and neighbors and bring up the matter of adopting the cash and carry plan before their clubs and societies; to wire or write to their Congressmen and Senators; to organize meetings to discuss the issue; and send any suggestions and financial contributions to the National Committee. In mid-October, William Allen White arrived in New York City to actively head the Committee's work. On October 15, he spoke over the Columbia Broadcasting System, stating:

These European democracies are carrying our banner, fighting the American battle. These democracies west of the Rhine and north of the Baltic are digging our first-line trenches. We need not shed our blood for them now or ever. But we should not deny them now access to our shores when they come with cash to pay for weapons of defense and with their own ships to carry arms and materials which are to protect their citizens and their soldiers fighting for our common cause.¹

The Committee put other speakers like Monsignor Ryan, Alfred E. Smith, Mayor Fiorella La Guardia, and Professor Charles Fenwick on the radio. It scattered over the country tens of thousands of statements supporting the cash and carry proposal, signed by leading Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant clergymen and by well-known college presidents. The Non-Partisan Committee did not operate directly on Congress. Instead, it had its members and their friends all over the nation deluge Congress with telegrams, letters, and postcards calling for support of President Roosevelt's cash and carry plan. Particularly gratifying to Mr. White was the support that Colonel Frank Knox, publisher of The Chicago Daily News, gave in lining up House Republicans for the bill.² Mr. White, himself, conferred with Joseph Martin, Republican minority leader of the House of Representatives, and other Republican members of the House to make sure that the Republicans as a party did not oppose the President's plan.

When Congressional opposition to the cash and carry provision collapsed on November 1, Mr. and Mrs. White, both homesick for Kansas, took the train for Emporia. Among the mail which awaited Mr. White at his office were letters from Cordell Hull,

¹The New York Times, October 16, 1939.

²Knox to White, October 18, 1939; White to Knox, October 23, 1939. (White Manuscripts)

Secretary of State, and President Roosevelt thanking him for his work. President Roosevelt wrote:

Dear Bill:

You did a grand job. It was effective and most helpful! I am writing this note just to say: "Thank you, Bill."¹

On November 14, Mr. White sent a letter to all members of the Non-Partisan Committee for Peace through the Revision of the Neutrality Law, saying that the work of the Committee was at an end. However, Mr. White planned to keep in touch with the members of this Committee so that he could call it into operation again if the occasion presented itself.²

On January 15, 1940, Clark Eichelberger, on his way to Dallas, Texas, to deliver a speech, stopped off at Emporia and spent an afternoon discussing the state of the world with Mr. White. Both of them were agreed on the need of an organization to awaken the American people to the significance of the Nazi movement. When Germany smashed into Norway and Denmark in early April, Mr. White went to New York with plans to go ahead and organize a committee with Clark Eichelberger which would:

consolidate and crystalize public opinion and let Congress know that millions of Americans were thinking about defending their country by keeping Great Britain armed on the battle line while we here in America went forward with our defense program.³

According to Mr. White:

The ruthless invasion of the northern democratic countries and the obvious design to enslave them gave the people of the United States a sickening sense of the reality of Hitler's purpose. By early spring, it was obvious that Holland was in danger and America began to see what kind of a war it was, the fanatical conquest of a pagan ideology which justified slavery, which exalted in cruelty, which banished chivalry, scoffed at equality of men, and was aimed straight at the dignity of the human spirit. It was then that the American people began to see, while it was not our war, it was our cause.⁴

¹Hull to White, October 31, 1939; Roosevelt to White, November 8, 1939. (White Manuscripts)

²White to Frederick Coudert, November 23, 1939. (White Manuscripts)

³White, "The Story of a Democratic Adventure." (White Manuscripts)

⁴Ibid.

Mr. White and Mr. Eichelberger decided to use the same method of organizing this Committee as they had used in organizing their Non-Partisan Committee for Peace through the Revision of the Neutrality Law. This was to gather together a list of influential people in all walks of life and write or wire them asking them to join the Committee. Eichelberger and White talked over their plans with Hugh Moore of Easton, Pennsylvania, manufacturer of Vortex drinking cups, and Frederick McKee, Pittsburgh cement manufacturer, and these two men agreed to stake the new Committee for a few weeks, while the Committee was getting contributions through the John Pierce Jones money-raising organization.

While Mr. White was in New York in late April, Mr. Frederick Coudert, Sr., New York lawyer, held a luncheon in his honor at the Downtown Association. Mr. White, through Clark Eichelberger, had asked Mr. Coudert to hold this luncheon meeting because he wanted to discuss with the assembled group ways and means of keeping the Republican party from adopting an isolationist attitude. The people present at luncheon were: Mr. White; Dr. Henry Atkinson, of the Church Peace Union; Dr. Frank Boudreau, of the League of Nations Association; Philip M. Brown, formerly professor of International Law at Princeton University; Nicholas Murray Butler, president of Columbia University; Frederick Coudert, Jr., New York Republican State Senator; Clark Eichelberger; Victor Elting, retired lawyer and president of the English Speaking Union; Thomas Lamont, banker; A. Warren Norton; Frank L. Polk, formerly Undersecretary of State; James T. Shotwell, professor at Columbia University; Alexander Williams; Colonel Henry Breckinridge; Colonel Henry L. Stimson; and Mr. Coudert, Sr.¹ Rush Holt and other isolationists were later to charge that this and other luncheons held by Mr. Coudert were made up of a sinister group "controlled by Wall Street" and that it was Wall Street that drafted Mr. White for his job as chairman of the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies.² An examination of the people present at this luncheon leads to the conclusion that Wall Street was almost without representation. The vast majority of the people were professional men and businessmen

¹Coudert to White, December 16, 1940. (White Manuscripts)

²The New York Times, August 23, 1940.

who had long been interested in world peace, the League of Nations Association, and the Union for Concerted Peace Efforts. As Mr. White later wrote, Eichelberger and he, alone, figured out the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. The boys in downtown New York did not even know it was being organized as far as he knew until he went to this luncheon and asked for their help in shutting off the Ham Fishes in the Republican platform committee.¹

Mr. White and Mr. Eichelberger realized that their new Committee would have to have more members and greater power to achieve its ends than the Non-Partisan Committee had had. Consequently, on May 17, seven days after Hitler invaded the Low Countries, a telegram was sent to people all over the country inviting them to join the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies.² Acceptance telegrams were sent to Emporia immediately from such figures as President Seymour of Yale University and President Conant of Harvard University; Catholic Bishop Lucey of Amarillo, Texas; Alderman Paul Douglas, professor at the University of Chicago; Dwight Davis, former Secretary of War; Judge Samuel Seabury; Ernest M. Hopkins, president of Dartmouth College; Bishop William T. Manning, on the theological right and Reinhold Niebuhr, on the left; Thomas Lamont, New York banker; Henry L. Stimson; Frank Knox; Freda Kirchwey, editor of The Nation; Roswell G. Ham, president of Mount Holyoke College; Thomas E. Burke, of the United Association of Plumbers and Steamfitters; Mary E. Woolley, former president of Mount Holyoke College; and, Quincy Wright, professor of International Law, the University of Chicago.³

With the formation of this large National Committee, Mr. White, the chairman, and Clark Eichelberger, the executive director, asked Hugh Moore to be chairman and Frederick McKee to be treasurer of the Executive Committee; and Thomas K. Finletter, New York City, Dr. Frank G. Boudreau, New York City,

¹White to Paul Hutchinson, November 7, 1940. (White Manuscripts)

²(White Manuscripts)

³For a complete list of the early members, see The New York Times, May 20, 1940; The Emporia Gazette, May 20, 1940.

Lewis W. Douglas, New York City, and Mrs. Emmons Blaine, Chicago, to compose the Executive Committee. Mr. White's job as National Chairman was to form the policy of the Committee with the final yes and no on all steps. Clark Eichelberger, as Executive Director, was to take charge of the task of organization and personnel.

For days after the public announcement of the formation of the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies on May 20, letters and telegrams poured into Emporia. The old roll-top desk of William Allen White, already heavily laden with pamphlets, books, and press clippings, creaked wearily under this new burden. Roughly nine out of every ten letters and telegrams were enthusiastic in their support of the Committee. It was necessary for the National Committee to do very little proselyting to organize local chapters all over the country. Frequently, the local League of Nations Association Office served as a focal point for the formation of these local chapters, as happened, for example, in Chicago. A few field workers were sent out, but, on the whole, the local chapters were formed in a spontaneous fashion, expressing the deep instincts of the American people for an Allied victory in the war.

On the West Coast, it was natural for William Allen White's friends, Chester Rowell of The San Francisco Chronicle and Guy Talbott, public utility executive of Portland, Oregon, to become the heads of a regional office. The office that was quickly set up in Boston in the last week of May with former Governor Alvin T. Fuller as head and James Bryant Conant as honorary chairman, soon became the regional office for two hundred local New England chapters. During the month of April, while Clark Eichelberger and Mr. White were organizing the Committee, a group was meeting at the Town Hall Club in New York City to consider what could be done to help the French and the British. The members of this group--among whom were Herbert Swope, journalist; Frank Kingdon, president of the University of Newark; and Virginia Gildersleeve, dean of Barnard College--naturally became the heads of the New York City chapter. This rapid expansion meant that by July 1, there were three hundred nine local chapters. This included every state in the Union except North Dakota.¹

¹Release on July 1, 1940, by the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. Hereafter to be cited as National Committee Release.

The local chapters were given a great deal of freedom by the National Committee. As long as they adhered to the National policy, it was possible to carry it out as they pleased. The National Committee did not select the local officers, nor did it discipline the local groups. Each chapter became a focal point for the distribution of propaganda literature, organizing public meetings, having speakers debating isolationists before clubs and professional groups, and sending letters to Congress asking for aid to the Allies. The workers in the local chapters more than the workers in the National Headquarters gave the Committee its strength and influence. Mr. White wrote that:

It is a democratic process, furnishing a nucleus in each community to which like-minded people may turn for information, for a way to energize their will and so to implement their courage.¹

On June 21, Mr. White left Emporia for the East to visit President Roosevelt, report the Republican National Convention for the North American Newspaper Alliance, and to work at the National Headquarters of his Committee. The day before he started, President Roosevelt had created a coalition cabinet by appointing Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War, and Colonel Frank Knox, Secretary of the Navy. In Washington, on Saturday, June 22, President Roosevelt told William Allen White that Stimson and Knox were in grave danger of not being approved by the Senate and asked him to help to change this situation. Mr. White took the names of the doubtful members and sent telegrams to influential people in these Senators' home states asking for pressure to be put on the Senators. On Sunday, telegrams began to pour into Washington, and, by Tuesday, there was no doubt that Knox and Stimson would be confirmed.²

On Saturday morning, June 28, Mr. White conferred with President Roosevelt about the work of the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. At this meeting, the President talked to Mr. White about swapping destroyers to England for naval bases in the English possessions of the Western Hemisphere. This

¹White, "The Story of a Democratic Adventure." (White Manuscripts)

²White to Charles P. Taft, July 5, 1940. (White Manuscripts)

was Mr. Roosevelt's idea, not Mr. White's. The relationship of President Roosevelt and the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies was important and close. Mr. White has described this in the following words:

My relationship to President Roosevelt has been more of a morganatic relationship. I knew I had his private support. . . . I never did anything the President didn't ask for, and I always conferred with him on our program.¹

The leadership of President Roosevelt was vital to the Committee, Mr. White added, for:

he never failed us. We could go to him--any members of our executive committee, any member of our policy committee. He was frank, cordial and wise in his counsel. We supported him in his foreign policy, many of us who voted against him in the election. . . . He was broad-gauged, absolutely un-partisan, a patriot in this matter if ever there was one.²

Furthermore, as Mr. White has pointed out, none of the Committee's objectives were attained which did not have the approval of the staffs and advisors in the Departments of State, Navy, and Army, "which," as he wrote, "is not bragging. The law requires it."³

The early objectives of the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies were to secure all moral and material aid which might legally be given to maintain England as the United States' first line of defense--planes, guns, ships, and food supplies; second, to stimulate the expansion of industry; third, to defend the Bill of Rights and civil liberties; and, lastly, to educate democracy for the preservation of liberty--appeasement and defeatism must be exposed at every turn.⁴ Beginning on July 23, the Committee centered its efforts on securing the release of fifty or sixty over-age, but recently reconditioned, American destroyers to England.⁵ Mr. White and his Committee felt that they must conclusively demonstrate to President Roosevelt that the country wanted the destroyers to go to England.

¹White to writer, interview, February 28, 1941.

²White, "The Story of a Democratic Adventure." (White Manuscripts)

³Ibid.

⁴National Committee Release, July, 1940.

⁵National Committee Release, July 23, 1940.

As Mr. White wrote:

If the President really wants to do it, it can be done. But we must show him that the country will follow him in this matter.¹

The Committee ran advertisements in New York, Washington, Chicago, and Kansas City papers urging people to write to Washington favoring the release of the destroyers. Rallies and radio addresses by prominent people were sponsored by the Committee. Probably the most influential radio address was delivered by General John J. Pershing on August 4. Three retired sea dogs--Rear Admirals Yarnell, Standley, and Sterling--added their voices to that of Pershing's for the release of the destroyers to England.² Two speeches, which were probably as influential as General Pershing's in stimulating the public to show President Roosevelt that they wanted destroyers to go to England were delivered by Ambassador William C. Bullitt, just returned from four years in France, and William Allen White. Bullitt warned, on August 18, that America was in danger and must act before it was too late.³ William Allen White pointed out to his radio audience:

If England falls, a new phase of civilization will dominate Europe and will menace the United States and the Western Hemisphere. It is not a question of form of government between Great Britain and the European dictators. It is a way of thinking, a way of life, a social order, a slave economy that menaces the world, and the world cannot live half slave and half free.

In concluding his radio talk, Mr. White stated that the long range objective of his Committee was to seek a world order among free people, where there would be political and economic equality for all free nations.⁴

A poll conducted on August 19 by the American Institute of Public Opinion revealed that 62 per cent of the American people supported the White Committee's desire to release destroyers to

¹White to his Policy Committee, July 26, 1940. (White Manuscripts)

²National Committee Release, August, 1940, contains these speeches.

³The New York Times, August 19, 1940.

⁴The Emporia Gazette, August 23, 1940.

England.¹ On September 3, President Roosevelt under executive authority, announced the release of fifty over-age destroyers to Great Britain in exchange for naval and air bases in English possessions in the Western Hemisphere.

The White Committee had from the outset various shades of political, economic, and diplomatic opinions. There were some who were rabid New-Dealers, and some who were as rabid in their dislike of the New-Deal. There were some who were extremely conservative about the amount of material that should be sent to England, while there were others who wanted the United States to declare war at once. In between these two poles of thought were Mr. White, Clark Eichelberger, and a majority of the Committee members. This middle-of-the-road group advocated all legal aid to Great Britain, hoping that this might forestall war for the United States. They never denied that aid to Britain might lead to war, but their contention was that the alternative, isolation, would lead us to war surer because it would mean that England would go down, and, then, we would be left without allies in a hostile world of dictators. If there was any escape from war, they sincerely and honestly believed aid to the Allies was the path.²

During these vital and tragic months, an amorphous group of individuals operated along parallel lines with the White Committee or at times in collaboration with it. This group had no fixed name or organization, but it was mentioned in the press as being the Century Club group or the Francis P. Miller Associates. Among the members of this group were Francis P. Miller, Herbert Agar, and Henry Sloane Coffin.³ Some of its members were members of the White Committee, but it was an independent group of distinguished citizens formulating their own views. As a group, it was not affiliated in any way with the White Committee. This group sometimes thought it wise to express an opinion in advance of the views of the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. Some of the group had signed a public statement on June 9

¹The New York Times, August 19, 1940.

²White to B. H. Jonnet, July 25, 1940. (White Manuscripts)

³Miller to White, July 18, 1940. (White Manuscripts)

advocating a declaration of war against Germany.¹

During the presidential campaign, Mr. White vigorously supported Wendell Willkie, and Clark Eichelberger supported President Roosevelt. Always on the issue of foreign affairs, William Allen White loyally supported President Roosevelt. Mr. White's relations to Wendell Willkie during the campaign were those of a trusted advisor. The last time that Mr. White saw President Roosevelt, he told the President that he must talk with Mr. Willkie as frankly as he had been talking to the President. Mr. White has described his relations to the two candidates in the following words:

. . . . during the entire campaign, my relations with these two men, heading the two party tickets, were equally frank and pleasant. Moreover, each of them knew that I was talking frankly to the other.²

He tried to bring the two candidates together in a common statement on sending the over-age destroyers to England. Although both men favored the transaction, Mr. White could not bring them together on a joint public statement or even a private agreement.³

It was quite natural, as the campaign reached great intensity in October, for the William Allen White Committee to become embroiled in politics. The official stand of the Committee was that it was non-partisan. On the whole, the National Committee retained its non-partisan stand quite well, but the trouble came from the enthusiasm of members of some of the local chapters. From the Los Angeles chapter, material supporting Wendell Willkie was sent out over the name of the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies.⁴ Members of the New York City chapter carried on a campaign to defeat Hamilton Fish, isolationist Congressman from President Roosevelt's home district.⁵

¹The New York Times, June 9, 1940.

²White, "The Story of a Democratic Adventure." (White Manuscripts)

³White to Chester Rowell, August 11, 1940. (White Manuscripts)

⁴Miriam Crenshaw to White, October 28, 1940. (White Manuscripts)

⁵Frank Kingdon to White, October 23, 1940. (White Manuscripts)

There can be no doubt that the campaign was a headache to Mr. White. Irate Rooseveltians disliked his editorials in support of Wendell Willkie, and ardent Willkiettes disliked his praises of President Roosevelt's foreign policy. In the midst of these worries caused by the campaign, there developed another source of irritation for Mr. White centering around the New York City chapter of the Committee. Mr. White felt that this chapter was going after side issues and endangering the main objectives of the National Committee. The New York City chapter came out for a complete boycott of all goods to Japan, and it opposed a benefit party for the Vichy French government.¹ Although Mr. White might feel that such activities were commendable of themselves, they nevertheless distracted the Committee's attention from the main purpose of crystalizing public sentiment to aid Great Britain.

By November, the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies had seven hundred fifty local chapters, with about ten thousand people doing active work in these local branches. The Committee, by this time, had collected roughly two hundred thirty thousand of dollars from over ten thousand donors. The average gift was twenty-five dollars. The smallest gift had been twelve cents in stamps from a W.P.A. worker. The largest gift was three thousand dollars from Mr. and Mrs. Wells P. Eagleton of Newark, New Jersey, with whom neither Clark Eichelberger nor William Allen White were acquainted. Among other donors of large gifts were Henry Luce of New York; Harry Scherman of New York; Mrs. William H. Moore, Pride's Crossing, Massachusetts; Mrs. Walter G. Ladd, Far Hills, New Jersey; and Edith Root Grant, Cleveland, Ohio.² To those people who charged that the Committee was financed by international bankers or munition makers, Mr. White always wrote that the books of the Committee were open for investigation. The books were regularly audited by New York accountants and any responsible person could see them. The Committee, from time to time, published a list of its leading contributors a policy which was in sharp contrast to the secret policy of its most

¹George Harrison Phelps to White, October 5, 1940.
(White Manuscripts)

²White to Mark Anderson, July 8, 1940. (White Manuscripts)

important opponent, the America First Committee.¹

On November 26, the White Committee formulated a new policy statement which contained the following section:

The life line between Great Britain and the United States is the sea route to the Western Hemisphere. Under no circumstances must this line be cut and the United States must be prepared to maintain it. The United States should supply Great Britain with all possible merchant vessels to fly the British flag.²

This policy did not advocate the repeal of the Neutrality Law nor the use of convoys by the United States, but such was implied if other measures did not succeed in maintaining the lifeline to Britain.

During December, the America First Committee, the No Foreign Wars Committee, and individual isolationists like Rush Holt charged that the White Committee was trying to lead the nation into war.³ On December 18, Mr. White received a letter from Frederick Coudert warning Mr. White that Roy Howard of the Scripps-Howard newspaper chain was going to unleash an attack on the White Committee. To head this off, Mr. White wrote a personal letter to Roy Howard explaining that the Committee was opposed to convoys and the repeal of the Johnson Act. Furthermore, added Mr. White:

The only reason in God's world I am in this organization is to keep this country out of war. . . . If I was making a motto for the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, it would be "The Yanks are not coming."⁴

Roy Howard asked Mr. White if he could publish this letter in his papers, and, after a day's thought, Mr. White gave his permission. Mr. White seems to have had a threefold purpose in mind when he authorized Roy Howard to publish this letter as an interview. First, he wanted to answer the "leonine accusations of fanatic opponents"--the America First Committee, Verne Marshall's

¹See, for instance, The Chicago Daily News and The Chicago Times, March 11, 1941.

²National Committee Release, November 26, 1940.

³The Louisville Times, December 16, 1940; The New York Times, December 17, 1940; The Chicago Tribune, December 19, 1940.

⁴December 20, 1940. (White Manuscripts)

No Foreign Wars Committee, and men like Rush Holt.¹ A second purpose seemed to be Mr. White's desire to serve notice on the Century Club group that the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies was not in any way favorable to their warlike utterances. His last purpose was to make his position on aid to Britain clear to the American public.²

The publication of this interview stirred up vigorous comment from both the Century Club group and from the various individuals and groups in opposition to effective aid to Britain. General Robert E. Wood and Charles A. Lindbergh publicly stated that Mr. White was in agreement with their views.³ Mr. White received a number of telegrams and letters from Committee members protesting his remarks to Roy Howard. On December 26, Mr. White wrote a public letter to Charles A. Lindbergh which clearly demonstrated that he was not in agreement with the America First Committee.⁴ Mr. White's letter to Colonel Lindbergh did not satisfy some of the more belligerent members of the New York City chapter of the Committee. On December 29, Mayor La Guardia published a letter to Mr. White in which he charged Mr. White with doing a "typical Laval."⁵ When this letter was published, Clark Eichelberger denied that there was any difference between the National Committee and Mr. White.⁶

Although Mr. White was firmly determined that the United States should play a major role in defeating Hitler, he had attempted to resign as chairman of the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies ever since the presidential election. His desire to retire was motivated by the toll that the responsibility and worry were taking on the health of a man of seventy-two. He warned his Executive Committee in November that he could not

¹White to Raymond Clapper, December 26, 1940. (White Manuscripts)

²White to John N. Wheeler, December 28, 1940. (White Manuscripts)

³The Los Angeles Times, December 25, 1940; The New York World-Telegram, December 24, 1940.

⁴December 26, 1940. (White Manuscripts)

⁵The New York Herald-Tribune, December 29, 1940.

⁶The New York Times, December 29, 1940.

stay on as chairman beyond January, 1941.¹ When Clark Eichelberger wired him on December 26 that his Howard interview was having unfortunate repercussions in the East, Mr. White decided that he would resign late in January at a dinner to be given in his honor by The Churchman, an Episcopal magazine, which had awarded Mr. White its annual award for distinguished service to the United States. He told Lewis Douglas that he would use this dinner to announce:

. . . . that a younger man is needed in this place; that a year's strain has taken its toll upon my mind and body and that I want to be relieved from the work. Which is the God's truth.

I shall be happier than you can know to be relieved from the dreadful responsibility that has been a shadow on my heart since I began this work. I have been happy in it. I am proud of it.²

On January 1, Lewis Douglas sent a telegram for the National Executive Committee to Mr. White urging him to come to New York to quiet the rebellion in the New York City and Washington chapters caused by his Howard interview, and, also, to direct the campaign that would be necessary in the next three weeks to carry out the Committee's program of supporting President Roosevelt's lease-lend bill. To Mr. White, this was an ultimatum--an ultimatum that he could not carry out. It would mean that he would have to go to New York for the balance of the time that he was still to be chairman. Living in New York City in an apartment in January was not conducive to good health at his age. Also, and more important, Mrs. White had been ordered to spend the winter on the desert to counteract poison that was in her head from sinus infection. After forty-seven years of married life, Mr. White could not leave Mrs. White alone in a strange hotel in the desert country.³

After long thought, Mr. White sent his resignation to his Executive Committee to take effect at once.⁴ From the letters

¹White to Charles Merz, January 18, 1941. (White Manuscripts)

²December 28, 1940. (White Manuscripts)

³White to the writer, interview, February 28, 1941.

⁴White to Hugh Moore, Lewis Douglas, and Clark Eichelberger, January 1, 1941. (White Manuscripts)

that Mr. White wrote in the weeks following his resignation, this general reason for his resignation appears to be most important: The small Century Club group--about a hundred members out of the half million membership of the Committee--were "ghost-dancing and creating an atmosphere in which the war bug tended to thrive." Unless Mr. White could have gone to New York and suppressed this, the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies would have been identified with a war-mongering spirit. But because of his own age and health and Mrs. White's delicate health, going to New York was out of the question. For the chairman to be in Arizona in January would be fatal to the Committee, and Mr. White decided to resign in order that a younger man, who could stay in New York to curb the Century Club "hotspurs," might be appointed at once.¹

Mr. White remained as Honorary Chairman at the insistence of Clark Eichelberger and Hugh Moore. When Ernest W. Gibson was appointed as chairman, Mr. White wired Gibson his support and offered his services.² Mr. White felt that Gibson would hold the Century Club group down, and, before long, he was convinced that the fight in the Committee had been settled his way.³ That Mr. White was still a vigorous supporter of Aid to Britain could be seen in his editorial support of the lease-land bill and by the speeches that he made at The Churchman dinner in his honor and at the University of Chicago on March 27.⁴

Late in April, Mr. White resigned as Honorary Chairman of the Committee. He had been receiving many letters abusing him for his continued support of the Committee, and his health was not adequate to permit him to answer these letters. If his name were no longer on the Committee's stationery, he could forward these letters to New York for the Committee to answer. Mr. White stated in a letter to Clark Eichelberger that the Committee's

¹White to Esther Brunauer, February 7, 1941; White to Felix Frankfurter, February 5, 1941. (White Manuscripts)

²The New York Times, January 10, 1941.

³White to Frederick Foote, February 5, 1941. (White Manuscripts)

⁴The Emporia Gazette, January 6, 1941; March 5, 1941; The New York Times, February 26, 1941; The Chicago Daily News, March 28, 1941.

stand in April favoring convoys had not led to his resignation as Honorary Chairman.¹ By this date, the prairie editor began to see that war seemed inevitable for the United States. If Hitler defeated Britain, we would surely be in the war. If he did not, we might not be in it. Thus, he concluded that the country would have been worse off if it had followed an isolationist course.²

Mr. White realized that the Committee's policy of advancing its objectives from time to time left the Committee open to the charge that they were edging the country closer and closer to war according to a premeditated plan. But as long as Hitler did not stand still with his onslaught on the British Empire, the Committee, which believed in defending the United States by helping Great Britain, could not stand still. He, and the vast majority of the Committee members, were sincerely against war, and their answer to the charge of their opponents was merely that the opponents overlooked changing events in a dynamic situation.³

William Allen White honestly and sincerely hoped that the policy of aid to the Allies short of war would keep the United States out of war. He, also, felt that the isolationist position would get the United States into war more quickly than his policy. He candidly admitted many times that his policy was not an absolute guarantee against getting the United States into war. Mr. White hoped, however, that aid to the Allies, short of war, would be the miracle that would permit the United States to escape the horror and tragedy of war. By May, 1941, when war was impending, he realized that the miracle had failed and that the United States was caught in an inevitable tide of rising war.

¹May 13, 1941. (White Manuscripts)

²The Emporia Gazette, April 10, 1941.

³White to writer, interview, February 28, 1941.

